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SANTA BARBARA POLICE CHIEF ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

Santa Barbara City Police Chief Lori Luhnow (courtesy photo)

PUBLIC NEWS / DEC 14 2020 11:20 AM / BY / 31 COMMENTS / READS 5769

Source: City of Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara Chief of Police Lori Luhnow has announced that she will retire from a 32-year career in law enforcement on February 13, 2021. Serving as Santa Barbara's first female Chief of Police since 2016, she oversees the Police Department's 200 sworn and civilian staff and a budget of $44 million.

Throughout her career, Chief Luhnow has been a strong proponent of community oriented policing and collaborating with diverse communities to prevent crime through problem solving. She has focused much of her attention on organizational transformation which aligned the department structure and resources to support community partnerships. Chief Luhnow implemented evidence-based policing, leading her staff to establish relationships with academics in the fields of criminology, psychology, and communication to bring current scholarship into police practice. In doing so, the SBPD partnered with the community to develop a nationally recognized evidence-based intervention to bring together police and the public.

Chief Luhnow institutionalized a culture that fundamentally changed the department's philosophy to 21st century policing. She created the department's first supervisor position whose responsibility is, in part, promoting employee wellness. Chief Luhnow has spoken to national law enforcement audiences on the topic of resiliency and wellness through the Bureau of Justice Assistance VALOR initiative. Additionally, during her tenure, she introduced civilian community members on hiring and internal promotional interview panels, expanding the community's voice and influence in its Police Department. She also took an early stand in the Police Department's commitment to protect everyone's rights, regardless of immigration status, ensuring that police officers did not engage in federal immigration enforcement.

To increase police officer staffing, Chief Luhnow implemented new officer recruitment strategies including a new website, streamlined application process, and a police recruitment team. She launched a Volunteers in Policing (VIP) program to enhance public outreach and assist with various law enforcement assignments, incorporating community members into the department while freeing up time for police officers to address calls for service.

Her leadership in Santa Barbara was recognized with awards from the Santa Barbara Rescue Mission and the Rotary Club of Santa Barbara, in addition to numerous awards from professional associations and community groups.

Prior to her service in Santa Barbara, Chief Luhnow served as a Captain with the San Diego Police Department, responsible for the Regional Police Academy and the in-service training and development of 2,500 police officers and civilians.

"I have deep appreciation for the community of Santa Barbara and enormous gratitude for the talented and dedicated employees of the Santa Barbara Police Department. It has been an honor and privilege to serve as your Chief of Police." said Chief Luhnow.

According to City Administrator Paul Casey, "I really appreciate Lori's leadership to work closely with the community and move the Police Department forward through many challenging issues, while also addressing the day-to-day operations and calls for service. She's been an excellent resource to our executive team and we'll miss working with her."

Mayor Cathy Murillo said, "Chief Luhnow is a great source of pride for our city. She has made a tremendous contribution to creating a culture of community-focused policing through hiring, training, and policy. I congratulate her on all her success in public service and wish her the best in the future."

While a nationwide recruitment is conducted, City Administrator Paul Casey will appoint Bernard "Barney" Melekian, Assistant County Executive Officer for the County of Santa Barbara, as the Interim Chief of Police to lead the department. He brings 46 years of law enforcement experience to the position, including serving as the Police Chief in Pasadena, the Director of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (USDOJ) and the Undersheriff in Santa Barbara County.

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BLAZER 1 DEC 14, 2020 07:54 PM

Recently when there was a problem downtown and the police didn't show up after numerous calls from citizens, the dispatchers when asked "where are the cops?" Replied "ask your city council".

Not sure that is a sign of All is Well at the station house.

HZ DEC 14, 2020 05:57 PM

4 years...seems a bit of a fly by night to me...

SENSIBLY COMMON DEC 14, 2020 04:59 PM

San Diego has its own retirement system. That's why she worked five years so she could qualify for Santa Barbara's retirement system. She was a good chief but has been checked out for a while.

Police and fire in California make a lot of money compared to other states. I think the police have a hard time retaining people here. But fire? If I remember correctly, their last recruitment resulted in over 700 applications.

A-1607992347 1 DEC 14, 2020 04:32 PM

For anyone who is interested have a look at Indeed dot com, a national job recruitment web site. Use the "Find Salaries" option, set job title to "chief of police," and set city, state, or zip to "United States." The average police chief base salary for the United States is $94,286. The city with the highest base pay is Santa Barbara at $200,588. Keep in mind that our city's population is tiny, around 100,000.

COASTWATCH DEC 14, 2020 03:17 PM

As for her pension, she has worked 30 yrs to attain her retirement benefit(s). Upper Admin postions move around from City(s) to County(s) as they have different pension programs, that should be quashed. It also prevents lower level positions from moving up the ranks.... A good is example is the ancient "Rasin" taking her place as interim Chief- That old guy needs to move on!

DOULIE 1 DEC 14, 2020 02:46 PM

What rank was Chief Luhnow when she left San Diego PD? Captain.

CITIZENSB DEC 14, 2020 03:11 PM

She was a captain make a total of $176K a year total pay and benefits when she left

San Diego in 2015. As Chief in SB she made $366K in 2017, $392K in 2018 and $322 in 2019. It will be interest to see her pay in 2020 and her retirement pay in 2021.

AHCHOOO DEC 14, 2020 01:45 PM

Why do we need to do a nationwide recruitment? Is that in the city rule book? I get that we want the best, and have to avoid internal strife due to perceived favoritism, but it seems nuts to have to search far and wide every time.

DOULIE 1 DEC 14, 2020 04:21 PM

PIT - Outside picks for the reasons you ID (nepotism/favoritism) make sense, but "favoritism" reportedly did occur with Sanchez. Would you agree money should be saved by assigning one of the current Captain's as "Interim Chief?" I believe the fire department did something similar.

PITMIX DEC 14, 2020 03:38 PM

Nationwide searches are to avoid charges of nepotism and old boy favoritism. Plus gives the human resources department something to do. A little for everyone.

DOULIE 1 DEC 14, 2020 02:30 PM

Why look for a Chief outside the PD? Is the City Administrator saying he doesn't have confidence current Captain's at the PD are qualified to handle the Chief's position? The next promotion from a police Captain position would usually be the Chief's position, but not always. Why is Melekian being hired as "Interim Chief," he knows less about the department than the local Captains that have likely been around close to 20 years? Are local Captain's not capable of even performing as the "Interim Chief?" At least one of the Captain's should have worked with the Chief close enough to understand how to function as the Chief. It appears the City Administrator is not giving much of a vote of confidence for our local Police Captain's.

VOICE OF REASON 2 1 DEC 14, 2020 01:15 PM

Also par for the course but not reported, often they save up their vacation time to cash it out in the last year vs. using it, they get credit for that towards the final salary in determining the retirement benefits, for life. I don't fault the public service employees who benefit from this, that's what they signed up for. I fault the fiscally irresponsible politicians that support this just to get (re)elected. An excellent reason why public sector unions should be barred from lobbying or making political contributions. (another is our public schools are still closed, if they were operating in the best interests of the kids they'd be open, but they defer to the teachers union, so they're closed).

A-1607979816 2 DEC 14, 2020 01:03 PM

Seems like another out of towner who has swooped into SB to harness the golden parachute, much like school superintendents, etc. Why do we hire “experienced” people only to have them retire on us?

HAPPY CAMPER ▲4 ▼ DEC 14, 2020 04:35 PM

Our prior chief, Cam Sanchez, had family here and was not nearly as progressive as Chief Luhnow. She did a lot to change the culture of the SBPD in positive ways. Sure, you and others may think she was only here for the money, but I know her and she is a dedicated professional. Realistically, most chiefs who can retire do so. We were lucky to have her and I hope her leadership style continues with the next chief.

A-1607978490 ▲ ▼ DEC 14, 2020 12:41 PM

Are you f***ing joking me? WOW

JUSTAGUY ▲7 ▼1 DEC 14, 2020 11:55 AM

Can someone explain, (in all seriousness) why we continue hired people for top public service jobs who are so close to retirement? It seems that four years is about the time it would take to "settle in" as a police chief. Did the people who hired her know this? Are they allowed to ask? How much money will we waste looking for a new chief now? How much is her retirement package and how much of it are we responsible for.

A-1608016161 ▲ ▼ DEC 14, 2020 11:09 PM

Justaguy - It's an extremely stressful job. Probably not a good idea to hire someone who will be around for decades. Not to mention they often become stagnant being in a job that long.....

ZEROHAWK ▲ ▼ DEC 14, 2020 04:29 PM

Ok thanks, Pit

PITMIX ▲1 ▼ DEC 14, 2020 03:39 PM

Zero, this is very common for the fire chiefs.

ZEROHAWK ▲ ▼ DEC 14, 2020 03:03 PM

Aside of Lori, whom else are you referring to?

SANTABARBARANATIVE ▲2 ▼1 DEC 14, 2020 12:55 PM

This habit of pension padding, continues because the City's management is complacent.

DOULIE ▲2 ▼ DEC 14, 2020 12:40 PM

I believe it's permissible to ask a job applicant how long they expect to remain in the position for which they are applying.

I'll guess the chief couldn't move up in rank in San Diego to increase her salary/pension. She's selected for the SB chief position that gives her both, especially an increase in pension. Just a guess. There may be personal reasons she chooses to leave at this time.

CITIZENSB ▲2 ▼1 DEC 14, 2020 12:29 PM

For the person ready to retire -- 3 years as chief significantly increase their pension. As for why they get hired for the short gig, it does not appear to be rational fiscal behavior as it would greatly add the the pension problem.
Hopefully it is not a quid pro quo.

A-1607974307 ▲3 ▼1 DEC 14, 2020 11:31 AM

Wow, that was a quick stay. Did she ever really live here? I read somewhere that she commuted from San Diego.

PITMIX DEC 14, 2020 03:41 PM

Zero, she went back to SD every weekend. I think worked 4 days here. Captains were pissed about having to cover for her 3 days out of 7. Did a daily commute seem reasonable to you?

ZEROHAWK DEC 14, 2020 03:02 PM

what? that's just dumb. yeah someone commutes 5 hours to SB every day.... 10 hours round trip....use your head

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A-1607978666 ▲3 DEC 14, 2020 12:44 PM

Which, frankly, should be illegal. I am so sick of high-ranking fire and police employees taking advantage of the retirement system at the expense of Santa Barbara.

A-1607974214 ▲2 ▼3 DEC 14, 2020 11:30 AM

"Chief Luhnow has been a strong proponent of community oriented policing and collaborating with diverse communities..." ahahahahah, yea right. Prove it.

HAPPY CAMPER ▲2 DEC 14, 2020 04:37 PM

Absolutely correct. best chief in memory. so we only had her for four years, but she was progressive and changed the culture from the Cam Sanchez era.

PITMIX ▲1 DEC 14, 2020 03:37 PM

The 4 years she worked here were her highest paid 4 years, we are on the hook for plenty of her pension. It's a bad sign when the Chief never actually moves to where her new job is. But she did a good job based on what we've heard. Hopefully her replacement can be as good.

ZEROHAWK ^5 v

DEC 14, 2020 03:01 PM

@ 214, prove it? Maybe if you stopped acting like a smart@ss and opened your eyes you would recognize and appreciate what she has done for our city. I personally do and most people I know do as well. As a long time local resident, dating back to about 1981, i can attest that Lori is by far the best police chief we have had...ever. Cam Sanchez was a crook and an abusive thug that hired similar people. Lori got rid of them, bridged the gap, hired and trained more level headed and smarter people to become officers. I personally have several friends employed there and they can back up that statement. Losing Lori just worries me now that we'll be stuck with another Cam Sanchez. Her pension comes from San Diego, she only worked here 4 years people.... and really stop acting like public servants don't deserve their pensions. They got the job, you didn't. They performed the job well, you didn't They risked their lives to do this job to keep you safe, you didn't. She deserves her pension. If you all have such an issue with it, change the laws. Do something about it instead of crying on edhat about someone elses retirement and mind your own affairs.

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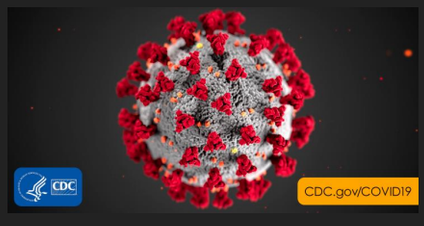

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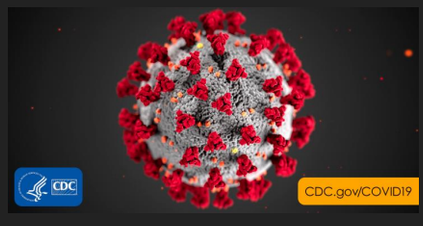

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COVID-19 / DEC 14, 2020

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I believe in Bill...Gates.

yacht rocked / December 15, 2020

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Is this the same Lisa Sloan

sbmh2015 / December 14, 2020

FREE FLU SHOTS AT COTTAGE URGENT CARE

10:57 PM

December 14, 2020

SOLVANG OPENLY DEFIES STATE COVID-19 ORDER

I feel bad for their

Lina24 / December 14, 2020

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Shasta, sorry to hear. I

GeneralTree / December 14, 2020

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Justaguy - It's an extremely
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Flu? What flu? Who needs the
420722 / December 14, 2020

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